

Alto Tower
West of 17th Street on the North side of
the Main Line
Altoona
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-229

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PA,
7-ALTO,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

ALTO TOWER

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1-

Location: West of 17th Street on the North side of the Main Line, Altoona
Blair County, Pennsylvania

USGS Quad: Altoona, Pennsylvania (1:24000)
UTM: 17 E.719760 N.4487600

Date of Construction: 1880

Builder: Pennsylvania Railroad

Present Owner: Conrail

Present Use: Railroad Traffic Tower

Significance: The Alto Tower is the only remaining active Main Line tower in Altoona. In addition, the tower contains early twentieth century signaling and switching equipment.

Project Information: This project was undertaken by HAER in conjunction with America's Industrial Heritage Project as part of an architectural survey covering a nine-county region in Southwestern Pennsylvania, Randall Cooley, Director. See HAER No. PA-108, Pennsylvania Railroad, Altoona Works, Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania for further project information and documentation.

Compiler: Peter Stott, Historian
Gray Fitzsimons, Editor

History:

Since the late nineteenth century rail traffic on the Pennsylvania Railroad has been regulated by either mechanical or lighted signals arranged in blocks along the right of way. The signals were manually controlled by signal operators, who were assigned to traffic towers, located along the right of way, usually adjacent to track crossovers or junctions of spur lines to a main line. The operators communicated with each other via telegraph, and with train crews via the signals or written messages, called train orders, which were delivered to passing trains. Additional towers were often located at the entrance or exit of major yard facilities. Due to the development of electronic communications in recent years, railroads have been consolidating signal operations at facilities with automated controls. The former Pennsylvania Railroad's Antis Tower was recently razed due to inactivity at the classification yards. The only remaining active Main Line tower in Altoona is the Alto Tower. Several other Main Line towers are extant in Cambria County including "AR" Tower in Gallitzin, "C" Tower in Conemaugh, "MG" Tower on the east slope of Allegheny Mountain between the Horseshoe Curve and the Summit Tunnels, "MO" Tower in Cresson, and "SO" Tower (see entry) in South Fork.

Sources:

Existing Structures Inventory. Pennsylvania Main Line, Pittsburgh Division, Conrail, Altoona, Pennsylvania.

ADDENDUM TO:
ALTO TOWER
West of Seventeenth Street on North side of Main Line
Altoona
Blair County
Pennsylvania

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